

- Thank you for that introduction, CAPTAIN Hall, and thank you so much for inviting me to join you today
- I speak on a number of topics in this job --- leadership, medical research and development, to wounded warrior support, TRICARE, what we are doing to recapture care or improve access to behavioral health services ...and a hundred other topics
- Today, is a little different, a little more personal
- This year we are observing the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 – one of the most important pieces of legislation that this country has ever passed into law.
- Black History Month and the lessons of history have deep meaning to me, and could consume quite a bit of time because the history of the African American in America is filled with struggles and justice delayed.

- But, at the same time, it has produced heroic figures who saw beyond their personal problems to give hope to others. We know the public figures – King, Thurgood Marshall, Rosa Parks, Carl Brashear, Jackie Robinson. But there are thousands less well known, like the thousands who marched in the 1960s and labored every day to change attitudes in the work places of America.
- I sometimes take my runs along the national mall, and pass the MLK Memorial. The image of him coming out of the mountain is symbolic, powerful and impressive. His was a powerful life cut short at the early age of 39, sacrificed for the cause of freedom, equality and opportunity....it's a story of almost biblical proportions.
- If there is nothing else you remember about my remarks, I do hope you remember this – I deeply believe that the military in general and the MHS specifically is a microcosm of our society.

- There is tremendous strength in our diversity. Our values of self-sacrifice, commitment to a unifying mission, and courage are values that transcend time and transcend our own personal backgrounds.
- I want to spend my time with you this morning, engaged in a conversation and not just a speech. So, I hope to use just some of the time on a personal reflection of how this country's path towards greater civil rights has affected me,
- and also how it continues to affect us all – particularly those of us in service to the country. And then I hope we can have some time to simply talk about that with all of you.
- Now, before I go into my own experiences and story, I also want to acknowledge that every one here has a story for how we got to where we are – where we are in our own lives, and where we are as a country.

- Black – white, male – female, gay – straight, Army-Navy-Air Force.

Whatever categories that you use to identify yourself brings a story with you about how you came to be engaged in service to the country, and in support of military medicine.

- Regardless of how you got here, you are part of a unique organization in American society.
- For each of us, we often tell our family stories against a backdrop of what was happening in the broader world around us...
 - what it was like to be a child during the Depression;
 - growing up during World War II as almost the entire globe was at war;
 - being a child of the 60s, or growing up as the Cold War was ending in the 1990s...
 - and today, there are children being raised who have known nothing other than a country at war...and if you are growing up

in a military household, that has been a particularly searing experience.

- Not all of these memories will be good ones, but these broader historical moments often shape how we think about the world, and how we interact with it.
- So, everyone has a story.
- Here's my story.
- I grew up in the 1960s and 1970s during a time of great social change in race relations in America
- I grew up in New York City, surrounded by a loving family that valued and expected hard work; that hoped that things would be better for the next generation...not unlike many of you in this audience today.

- But, to be fair, this hope for a better life for the next generation was not always a hope fulfilled for black Americans in the first half of the last century
- Growing up in the 60s, weekend was family time. EXTENDED family time. Every Saturday and Sunday, we would have grandparents, and aunts and uncles, and more than a few cousins together...
- And like all family gatherings, after the brief hellos,
 - the kids would break away to play,
 - and the adults would break away to talk
- But, as we all know from our own experiences, there are times when adults think that kids are playing...but they are really listening in on the adult conversations. There is a tone to adult conversations that indicates a heightened seriousness, even a tension that kids can sense.

- The uncles would be talking about Dr. King, and another march.
- There were a number of clergymen in my family, including my father – a Baptist minister -- and they would talk about how they could support the efforts in the South through their churches.
- You could see the concern on their faces...worried about whether some of the killings in the South would spread to the North; worried about the general uneasiness in the country at large...because even though the center of the civil rights movement was in Georgia, and Alabama and Mississippi, the North was hardly immune to racial hostility...and eventually riots.
- I went to high school in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, but lived in Crown Heights, some distance away.
- I took a series of buses to get to school

- The neighborhoods that I traveled through were deeply segregated by ethnicity...not just black and white...and each neighborhood had its own characteristics, and brought its own set of dangers to outsiders
- And, in that era, navigating those neighborhoods required advance planning.
- I am not kidding. I mean ***actual planning*** about how you would get through certain neighborhoods.
- There were times you took a bus and could walk a few blocks to catch the next bus... and then there were times you never left the bus, even it meant going a good deal out of your way, in order to get to, or home from, school
- Truth be known, I was fearful on some of those days.

- And one of the things that the Civil Rights Act did...was to help

reduce ...not eliminate, but reduce...the fear that many people had in

going about their daily lives. Knowing that the law was explicitly on

their side.

- Some of the greatest figures in the civil rights struggle acknowledged

this fear too. Last year, I watched a documentary about Martin

Luther King. And in it, Coretta Scott King is interviewed, and she

admits to something that she had not previously shared.
 - She says she was 'ashamed' at herself during the early civil

rights marches because she told Martin that he shouldn't go to

some of the marches. She feared for his personal safety; she

feared for his life.

 - And even though she believed deeply in the causes that they

were advancing, like almost anyone, down deep her fears were

real.

- Coretta Scott King saw this as a moment of weakness. A moment when she felt she betrayed her values.
- Of course, she ultimately recognized that there are times in our lives when there is more at stake than our personal safety; when principles are so great that they require us to weigh our personal well-being against a greater good. Not easy to do.
- Because Coretta King's memory is my childhood memory too. As a kid, I could see the worry in the eyes of my relatives, and the risks that they were willing to take on behalf of a cause that was greater than their own personal comfort.
- This defines courage – being able to subordinate your fears and do what is right and needed when the outcome and future is not certain.

- And throughout these large and small ordeals, these men and women carried themselves with extraordinary dignity and patience.
...through the threats, jailing's and beatings,
 - And...I want to make an important point – the men and women who took these risks in the 1950s and 1960s were not all black. There were individuals from all races, all religions, all ethnicities who understood the principals involved in the civil rights struggle, and who stood shoulder to shoulder with African Americans. And some of them lost their lives as a result.
 - They perhaps were more courageous in that they could have ignored the plight of others and had a more peaceful, prosperous future if not involved in the civil rights struggle.
Doing what is right when it will cost you something is not innately easy.

- I made it through high school just fine. While I like to believe that my hard work in high school paid dividends for me; I am the first to recognize that a hell of a lot of people sacrificed so that I could go to college.
- A lot of people, most of whom I will never know, took risks that made it easier for me to get into medical school.
 - I was one of four African American students from a class of 170
 - And I was the only black surgical resident at Harvard Medical School and the Massachusetts General Hospital.
- I thought I had made it. But, despite the tremendous progress that was made from the 1960s to the 1980s, we still had hurdles.
 - A true story: Here I am in Boston in the early 1980s, on my emergency rotation residency...when a badly wounded

gentleman from South Boston with gunshot wounds is brought in to the ER. If you know South Boston at all, you know that this was the center of much racial tension in the Boston community.

- I'm called to respond to the emergency, and when I enter the room, the guy looks at me and says:
 - "No offense doc, but I don't want a black guy operating on me."
- Now, I am not sure which is the more amusing part of that story
 - The fact that a guy bleeding to death in the ER thought he had the luxury of picking his doctor...

- Or the fact that he prefaced his remarks with “No offense doc”
- None taken!
- His attitude was not unique and a generation would need to pass before things would substantially change.
- A reminder that old habits die hard, and they require the work of generations
- I think about what many people of my father’s and grandfather’s generation did so that I could be here today, talking to all of you, as a vascular surgeon, as a general in the US Army Reserves, and as the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs

- There is no question that without the millions of Americans who took risks based on principles, who exhibited enormous personal courage based on an idea, I wouldn't be where I am today
- This represents courage that I can only hope to re-pay with my own courage on behalf of others
- And, I will tell you, one of the organizations that best provides this opportunity to give back, and help pave the way for others is the one we are fortunate to serve in – the US military and the US government
- One last story...
- I can remember like it was yesterday, telling my Dad at a Thanksgiving dinner that I was going to be commissioned as a CAPTAIN in the Army. He had a look of what I thought was concern on his face...he asked a lot of questions.

- Now, you need to understand that my Dad and my Uncles were conscripts in World War II.
- They were proud of their service, but they also served at a time when the Army was segregated and the possibility of advances for African Americans was poor.
- They served when white officers would tell them to their face “Do what I say or I will kill you, and no one will care.” And they meant it.
- So it was reasonable to expect some rebuke from the family about my plans...after all, I was a physician didn't need to do this. There was much quiet discussion between my father and uncles that day.
- Well, subsequent conversation that evening revealed that the tears in their eyes were not from fear but pride in the fact that I could be commissioned as an officer...a Captain no less...something unattainable in their generation. After dinner, I was welcomed into the “men’s club” with much talk of their wartime experiences.

- It took them a while to get their heads around how far the US military had changed since they had served.
- Their pride in my military service never waned.
 - The day I was promoted to full Colonel fulfilled every dream my father had.
 - My father had died by the time I was promoted to Brigadier General, but my uncle continued to call me because, as he would say “I just like to call a General.”
 - I lost that uncle late last year, and I miss those calls for a lot of reasons...but one of them is the reminder to me of my obligations to those who paved the way for me to be where I am today
- I have many people to thank for my advancement in the ranks.
 - But – here in a building where we closely follow the law and where we craft federal regulations, it’s important to remember that laws and regulations matter...and affect the lives of many people for generations

- Harry Truman desegregated the military in 1947 to the admonition of many that he would ruin it forever. We know this turned out to be more than untrue. His action made the military stronger, the nation stronger, and everyone better for it.
- But, we all know, that the integration of the military did not change life for everyone. And the challenges of the 1950s and 1960s led us to the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- And, I think it's important to note that at the signing of this landmark piece of legislation, President Johnson also invoked the heritage of military service.
- I want to read to you what President Lyndon Johnson said at the signing:

"This is a proud triumph...Those who founded our country knew that freedom would be secure only if each generation fought to renew and enlarge its meaning. From the minutemen at Concord to the soldiers in Viet-Nam, each generation has been equal to that trust.

Americans **of every race and color** have died in battle to protect our

freedom. Americans **of every race and color** have worked to build a nation of widening opportunities. Now our generation of Americans has been called on to continue the unending search for justice within our own borders.

The purpose of the law is simple.

It does not restrict the freedom of any American, so long as he respects the rights of others.

It does not give special treatment to any citizen.

It **does say** the only limit to a man's hope for happiness, and for the future of his children, shall be his own ability.

It **does say** that there are those who are equal before God shall now also be equal in the polling booths, in the classrooms, in the factories, and in hotels, restaurants, movie theaters, and other places that provide service to the public."

Its purpose is to promote a more abiding commitment to freedom, a more constant pursuit of justice, and a deeper respect for human dignity.

We will achieve these goals because most Americans are law-abiding citizens who want to do what is right."

- And this is maybe my primary takeaway from my years in Service.

The military has been a ***powerful*** agent of good for social change in this country; a fact that that cannot be taken for granted

- We have successfully stood up for the rights of others...freedom for many people in many countries over the years.
- We've expanded opportunities for women in the military; slowly by some measures, but always moving forward...with announcement last year that removed the last prohibitions against women serving in all combat positions.
- And, we have opened the military to allow gay service members to serve openly and without fear of retribution.
- The President invoked the forebears at Seneca Falls, and Selma and Stonewall...acknowledging the courage of individuals who were way ahead of their time; many who didn't live to see the day that we now enjoy.
- Every one of these actions took courage to advance the rights of others.

- And I recognize that not everyone agrees with the decisions that our civilian leadership has made.
- But we move forward anyway. Under the law.
- These are values we espouse and we try our hardest to live up to, as men and women in service to the government, and as individuals who work in the field of medicine
 - Our progress is made in the seemingly little things we do;
 - When people are not being treated well, we need to stand up every time...and hone our own personal courage. I am not talking about medical treatment...but the human interaction with our staff, our patients and the families of both

- We need to commit to personal courage even when no one is looking....in how we treat patients; in how we respect one another; in how we improve as an organization...in readiness, in patient safety, and in acknowledging when an individual in our charge is not meeting standards for performance
- And we need to commit to personal courage to do the right thing, the moral thing, the ethical thing for people...as government professionals and as medical professionals
- We have been tested in our courage over the last decade of war; we have not been perfect, but we have succeeded far more frequently than we have fallen short
- In fact, our values as military officers are reinforcing of our values as health professionals...they sustain each other

- These experiences in my life, the good and the bad, have informed my perspectives on how to advance a sense of community in those places where I work; how to help everyone recognize the degree to which diversity strengthens organizations; and how to never let pass an opportunity to hone my own personal courage.
- I am immensely grateful for the sacrifices of my relatives and of people I never knew.
- The lessons from the civil rights struggles of the last century are timeless.
- We have not solved our problems in issues of race relations, gender relations, or in matters of sexual preferences. As a country, we still struggle with how to best deal with the many people of other countries who want to study here, work here, and live here.

- Our progress cannot just be taken for granted. As King also said,
“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” And perhaps
more fittingly, “Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than
sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.”
And I would add complacent.
- But the institution that we are members of, is part of the solution.
- I hope my personal reflections have meant something to you as well.
I am so grateful for the chance to be here today, and I hope we have
some time for discussing your thoughts, your questions, or your
suggestions on how we can be even better.
- Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.